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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000798

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH-ARMENIAN RAPPROCHEMENT: NO LIGHT AT THE
END OF THE TUNNEL

REF: A. ANKARA 317

[B](#). ANKARA 2522

Classified By: Consul General David Arnett for Reasons 1.5 (b&d)

[1](#)1. (c) Summary: Until now Istanbul-based initiatives have had an important role to play in track-two moves to improve Turco-Armenian relations. However, the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC), much-derided by the Armenian diaspora and largely ignored by Turks, has discontinued its active work and appears to be reinventing itself as a more passive bilateral forum. Separately, a Vienna-based initiative to bring together Turkish and Armenian historians has attracted little attention in Istanbul and will have trouble finding common ground between its participants. Citing an unfavorable political climate and bilateral tensions, the Armenian Patriarch has asked the Armenian Catholicos to delay a planned visit to Turkey until [2](#)2006. End Summary.

The TARC is Dead, Long Live the TARC

[1](#)2. (c) At an April Moscow meeting, the TARC decided to declare victory and "discontinue" its work. Former Turkish Foreign Minister Ilter Turkmen and former Bilgi University Rector Ilter Turan, two of the Turkish participants, both told Istanbul poloff that the TARC had largely succeeded in its limited objectives, namely, to develop a rapport and an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence between key unofficial Turks and Armenians. In Moscow, they endorsed the recommendations of coordinators David Philips and Joe Montville to take the logical next step and use this core group of individuals in a reconstituted Consultative Group to support and promote worthwhile track-two initiatives. The new group will meet less frequently (perhaps annually), but will include a wider range of businessmen, academics, and NGO figures.

[1](#)3. (c) At the same time, the TARC members undertook to approach their respective governments to offer advice on how to advance reconciliation efforts. Both Turkmen and Turan said that the recommendations would include an opening of the Turkish-Armenian border. Both noted, however, that Armenia would also need to explicitly reject any territorial claims on Turkey. (Comment: However, the Turkish MFA has told us in Ankara, Armenian recognition of the border is not sufficient for Turkey to open the border or restore diplomatic relations; concessions on the occupied territories would have to be part of any package that would do the trick. End Comment). Turan opined that this could be accomplished by measures short of rewriting the Armenian Declaration of Independence and Constitution, perhaps even "a simple parliamentary resolution" would do. Turkmen averred separately that he thought a statement that explicitly refers to the appropriate articles in the 1921 Moscow and Kars Agreements would be sufficient. According to Turkmen, the Armenian members of TARC also agreed on the need for such a statement. Turan added, however, that some kind of "face-saving" measures might also need to be taken to give Azerbaijan the cover it would need to accede to such a development.

Viennese Armenian-Turkish Platform

[1](#)4. (u) A separate initiative, the Viennese Armenian-Turkish Platform (sometimes referred to as the Turkish-Armenian Historical Commission) is also making an effort to tackle the "genocide" issue directly. Academics from both Armenia and Turkey, presumably with permission from their governments, have already exchanged historical information and documents and are due to meet in Vienna on July 25. This initial meeting is ostensibly to prepare for a more formal meeting to take place next spring. Judging by recent anti-Armenian statements of Yusuf Halacoglu, President of the Turkish History Institution and the senior Turkish participant, the commission will be hard-pressed to find much middle ground between the two sides. Halacoglu also co-authored a new book that debunks Armenian "genocide" claims, including a

"mathematical" refutation of the much-cited assertion that 1.5 million Armenians perished in that period.

Visit of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev

15. (c) Armenia-bashing was the dominant theme of Azeri President Aliyev's April 13-15 visit to Turkey. Azerbaijani Ambassador Mehmed Nevruzoglu Aliyev, Azerbaijani Consul General Ibrahim Nebioglu Yagubov and DCM Abdullahyev have all told us that the primary agenda item for the visit was "to put an end" to any plans to relax the current Turkish border restrictions with Armenia. Ambassador Aliyev claims that while there may have been some support for a border opening at the "mid-levels of the Turkish bureaucracy" (Comment: A misperception: see reflets and previous. End Comment.), senior Turkish officials disavowed any plans for such measures in their meetings with President Aliyev.

Visit of Catholicos Karekin II

16. (c) Catholicos Karekin II of Echmiadzin has been planning a visit to Turkey (the last such visit was made several years ago by his predecessor). Kaan Soyak, Co-Chairman of the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council, told poloff that he had been passing messages between Yerevan and Ankara and thought that such a visit might take place as soon as this year. However, Armenian Patriarch Mesrob II, who has been consulting with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (who would likely invite the Catholicos for an ecumenical visit) told poloff that he had recommended that the visit be postponed to 2006. Mesrob argued that he was unprepared for a visit this year and that with 2005 being the 90th anniversary of the "genocide," tensions would be too high for such a visit before Spring 2006. Even then, Mesrob added, he would not "allow" the Catholicos to visit any sensitive sites in eastern Turkey for fear that this would simply exacerbate tensions. (Comment: Inter-church politics and unresolved tension between Mesrob and Karekin (which Mesrob attributes to Karekin's "overly politicized" nature) may have influenced Mesrob's desire to postpone the visit. Embassy Ankara and ConGen Istanbul would be interested in Embassy Yerevan's views on the subject of a possible visit by Karekin).

ARNETT